LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 977
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

Pope Alexander VI and His Loves

Clement Wood

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POPE ALEXANDER VI AND HIS LOVES

CHAPTER I

THE PAPACY IN THE 15TH CENTURY

In B. C. 4, or "four years before the birth of Christ," to use our current Christian chronology, Jesus, later called the Christ or redeemer, was born at Bethlehem in Judea, according to the New Testament, as chronologized by Christendom. In his thirtieth year he entered upon a public ministry lasting seven years, and ending, according to the Gospels, with his crucifixion by Rome, instigated by the Jewish heirarchy, followed by his posthumous appearances to various groups of disciples, and his ascension into heaven. Waiving all question of historical accuracy of this account, we learn that Jesus ordered man to love his neighbor as himself, with the exception of his own family, which must be hated, as the price of being a Christian (Luke xiv:26, and elsewhere); that to obtain heaven, men and women must neither marry nor be given in marriage (Luke xx:34-36); that men must not lay up for themselves treasures upon earth (Matthew vi:19, 20). In addition to these keystone teachings, Jesus appointed one of his apostles, Symeon Cephas, Grecized into Simon Peter, as the earthly residuary of much or all of his power; and, by what Christians call the apostolic succession, this power is said to have been transmitted by Simon Peter to his official successors,

and notably, according to the Roman Catholic account, to the Popes of Rome. From 1492 to 1503, this power was held by Rodrigo Borgia, under the title of Pope Alexander VI. From the teachings of Jesus mentioned, we know in advance what sort of man he must have been: one who loved mankind, hated his family, opposed marriage and sexual mating, and scorned earthly wealth. It is somewhat of a shock to find, both in Roman Catholic accounts and elsewhere, that he differed a bit from this. The *Britannica* sums up this difference by saying that Alexander's dominant passions were greed of gold, love of women, and fond devotion to his bastards.

It is necessary to glance briefly over the outstanding developments of the intervening years, to see how the vicar of Christ on earth should have been, in every aspect, the infidel antithesis of his forerunner. The exhaustive two volume study of the Popes of Rome by Louis Marie de Cormenin, published soon after 1846, bases its statements on an ample and accurate rendition of the early authorities, both Roman Catholic and secular; and we shall use it chiefly for this preliminary vista. After Pope Leo the Fourth, a woman named Joan ascended the papal chair, pretending to be a man. She became *enceinte* by a cardinal, and died in childbirth while presiding over a religious ceremony. Pope Sergius the Third had his pet courtezan Marozia—one among hundreds who lifted a prostitute to the favored place in their embraces; the son of Sergius and Marozia, who became Pope John the Eleventh, was accused

by cardinals and bishops of incest with his mother, and of violation of the holy virgins. Another son of Marozia became John the Twelfth; one of his concubines, Stephenette, died in the palace of the Lateran in childbirth.

Among other outstanding popes may be mentioned John the Twenty-third, who established the Inquisition, called the Holy Office, in Spain, and who was officially indicted for incest, sodomy, carnal intercourse with three hundred religious women, rape of three sisters, and the imprisonment of a whole family, mother, father and son, in order to abuse them. Conditions had been inharmonious with the height of Christian teachings long before this. By the tenth century, the monasteries, according to current historians, had become homes of prostitution and sodomy; Honorius, priest of Antron, said that the nunneries of his time, the eleventh century, had become beds of the beast, "all of whose couches are defiled by the most horrid debauchery." Menard, Count of Tyrol, thus summed up the thirteenth century:

> The occupations of the priests are to get bastards, preside over orgies, and invent new modes of extorting money from the people.

Under John the Twenty-second, in the fourteenth century, appeared the first comprehensive code of financial indulgences for crimes, which contained the following among other choice bargain rates for high-class sins:

> Fornication between an ecclesiastic, with nuns, nieces, or goddaughters, he shall be absolved for 67 francs, 12 sous.
> Additional bestiality, 219 francs, 12 sous.

Deflowering of a virgin by a priest, 2 francs, 8 sous.

A nun who has abandoned herself to several men, successively or simultaneously; who wished to become abbess, 131 francs, 15 sous.

Incest by a layman, 31 livres, 1 sou.

Simple murder of a layman, or several on the same day, 15 francs, 4 sous, 8 deniers.

Incest with one's own children, an additional 6 francs.

Murder of one's wife, 17 francs, 15 sous.

Murder of their child by father and mother, 27 francs, 1 sou. Murder of a father or mother, the same.

Absolution in advance for every accidental murder, 168 francs, 15 sous.

Eunuchs who wished to enter sacred orders, 300 francs, 15 sous.

There are those who complain that the efficiency methods of big business destroy the lovely simplicity of ancient life. It is interesting that organized religion, six centuries ago, made a start toward standardizing morality. This papal tax brought a long-continued prosperity to the papal treasury; there are no statistics available as to what treasures it laid up in heaven.

As late as the seventeenth century, at about the time the English colony of Virginia was established, Pope Paul the Fifth committed adultery, incest, and sodomy; Innocent the Tenth conducted adultery and incest with the two Olympias, two years after the first Harvard commencement; and Pius the Sixth, whose tenancy of the Holy See lasted twenty-three years after the American Revolution commenced, or until 1799, was publicly accused of sodomy, adultery and incest. This was the conduct for more than a thousand years of the

religious leaders of Christendom: the morality of the lay kings and nobles, and of the darkened mass of the misled people, may have been, if it were possible, more darkly spotted in places, but hardly as technically standardized in vice.

At the death of Pope Nicholas the Fifth, in 1455 A. D., an old Spanish cardinal named Alphonso de Borgia, or Borja, seventy-seven years old, whose long-continued irregularities had weakened his moral and mental faculties, pottered around Rome stating that he would be the next pope, according to a prophecy of Saint Vincent Ferrier. The political intrigues for the election continued, no one paying much attention to the old gentleman; but, when a deadlock occurred between the principal candidates, one and all enthusiastically had their support turned over to the Borgia, on the ground that he was too old to live much longer, and that the breathing space would give each a chance to strengthen his forces in the College of Cardinals. So Alphonso de Borgia gained the Holy See, and held it for three significant years.

According to a letter of Alphonso of Arragon, the man's family had been of the lowest. Raised to the Christian zenith, one of his first acts was to appoint his two nephews, Peter and Rodrigo Borgia, as cardinals, although the first was only twenty-one, and the second only twenty-five. Being Borgias, and insatiable for power, the young men demanded more; whereupon Peter was made, in addition, papal treasurer, and Rodrigo, vice-chancellor of the Holy See. King Alphonso of Arragon appealed to the

holy father for confirmation of the thrones of Sicily and two Italian cities in three of his own natural sons. The pope, who had adopted the name of Calixtus the Third, desiring the crown for his nephew Peter, refused the request. Accordingly King Alphonso wrote His Holiness a letter, which has come down to us, in which he lashed the infamous morals of Calixtus, and his insatiable desire for wealth. Among the unpleasing family skeletons which he jangled in the papal closets were his charges that Peter and Rodrigo were in reality the Popes sons (fruits of the Borgia's incestuous relationship with his own sister), and that these two men had earned papal favor by serving continually as his minions, the polite name given to men who serve another in Socratic love, the love extolled as highest by Socrates in his celebrated dialogue, *The Banquet* or *Symposium*. Before this conflict spread into open warfare, the aged Calixtus died, leaving in his natural son or nephew, Rodrigo Borgia, a member of the family who would finally lift the low Spanish family to the very height of European position.

While Rodrigo continued his shrewd policy of gaining power, with the tiara of St. Peter as his final object, we may glance at the popes who intervened between Calixtus III and Alexander VI. Pius the Second, who succeeded immediately, had been born Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, son of a Tuscan outlaw. In his early youth Aeneas Sylvius abandoned himself to the vilest practices, and became a minion of all the priests of the neighborhood. One of his

corrupters was an abbot, who was so smitten with the youth that he gave him a high education; and later on Aeneas became bishop, and then cardinal. After a reign of six years, this Pius was succeeded by Paul the Second, nicknamed "Our Lady of Pity" from his ability to weep hypocritically whenever he chose,—a man whose mania was that he was an infallible physician, and who spent his time preparing salves and pills for his ailing friends. In his old age, he became so vain of his facial beauty, that he passed whole hours covering himself with carmine and paint, and tapped the papal treasury for female ornaments of lace and jewelry for his person. He is best remembered for his gem of infallible wisdom, "Religion ought to annihilate science, because science is the enemy of religion." Science is man's organized knowledge and methods of approaching truth; and the carpenter of Nazareth had said, "I am the way and the truth; and the truth shall set you free." But when was freedom the aim of the papacy?

On the death of Paul, a Genoese named Francesco D'Albexola, son of a poor fisherman, was elected to the throne. This boy, for his youthful attractiveness, had been made a minion by the Lord Della Rovera. Three sober historians affirm that, when cardinal, the Holy Father had deflowered each of his sisters in turn, and had even pushed his lubricity so far as to use, in his monstrous debauches, his own young children, the fruits of an incestuous commerce between himself and his eldest sister. Adopting the name of Sixtus the Fourth, the

new pope published a bull, or papal law, declaring that the nephews and bastards of the popes should be, of right, Roman princes. When he was accused of nepotism, or advancing his nephews for family reasons, the historian Duplessis Mornay ironically defends the pope, pointing out that he advanced, not his nephews, but only his own bastards, who had become his minions; and ignored the sons of his brothers.

Innocent the Eighth, who succeeded this antiparagon, had sixteen bastards when he reached the sovereign pontificate. He had early become the minion of the cardinal, Philip Calendrin; and the outstanding portrait of him comes from Prince Zizim, son of Mohammed the Second, who refused to give the customary kiss to the feet of the pontiff, swearing by the beard of Mahomet that he would not touch "such a dirty baboon." Innocent sought to prolong his life, during his last sickness, by means of a frightful beverage, composed at his orders from the blood of three young boys of ten years old, who were murdered for the purpose. We have the solemn word of Stephen Infessura for the correctness of this story. At his death, the throne was secured by bribery, shameless and open, by Rodrigo Borgia, the natural son or nephew of Calixtus the Third. In the year 1491 or 1492 this "most memorable of the corrupt and secular popes of the Renaissance," to quote the *Britannica* again, ascended the seat of St. Peter.

This contemporary background, rather than the simple story out of Galilee, indicates to us what sort of prelate we may expect the Borgia to be. Have him born in the time when the

caves at Altamira were being painted; or in the frantic days when Hannibal's trumpet echoed triumphantly over trodden Italy; or in the days of Standard Oil and Babe Ruth, and he would unquestionably have had a different story. If he had remained entirely the same in nature and actions, he would have found himself out of touch with his age, and would have passed unnoticed, save perhaps in executioner's records. If, as is more probable, his immense ambition and energy would have adapted themselves to a different age, he might have been some forgotten neolithic Thor, or another Scipio, or even a millionaire suzerain of industry. In the decadent atmosphere in which he was born, the papacy was the world's Everest, and the way to the top led through lowlands of incredible debauchery. Rodrigo was capable of both, and gained both.

CHAPTER II

YOUTH: VANOZZA DEI CATTANI

According to many authorities, Rodrigo Borgia was the offspring of Alphonso de Borgia, or Borja, who ascended the papal throne as Calixtus III, and of his sister Joanna, who was married to a certain Godfrey Lenzuolo of Valencia; and that his holiness, desiring to bequeath to Rodrigo his own name, required his brother-in-law to abandon his own name, and take that of Borgia. The *Britannica* gives his father's name as Lanzol or Llancol, and the date of birth as January 1, 1431; stating that he adopted his mother's family name on the elevation of his uncle to the papacy. Rafael Sabatini, whose study of Rodrigo and his son, Cesare Borgia, is an amusing application of belated whitewash, says of Rodrigo that he was "ambitious, worldly, greedy for power, and a prey to carnal lusts." If his defenders grant that much, it is not hard to conjecture what the true picture must have been.

We know little of his youth. According to the custom of the time, it is probable that he was intentionally debauched by his parents and guardians, as the young queen of Naples, Joanna, was. Since reliable accounts indicate that he was the minion of his "uncle," or father, who later became Calixtus III, it may well have been this distinguished Christian jurist who initiated the young Rodrigo into

the precocious sexual play that once distinguished the cities of the plain, before Sodom and Gomorrah became a smoking stench in the air and an enduring symbol of the sterility of eccentric love indulgences. As a young man, Rodrigo studied law at Bologna, and entered upon his practice, devoting himself especially to the defense of immoral and even scandalous causes. Soon this profession became insupportable to him, because it required him to place a certain restraint on his morals. He threw himself into the service of arms, being made an officer of a free company of soldiers. This gave him the amplest opening to enter to his heart's content into the comprehensive debaucheries that were notorious in Spain and throughout much of Christian Europe.

About this time, Rodrigo entered into a liaison with a Spanish lady, of remarkable beauty. The woman was a widow, with two daughters. First Rodrigo seduced the mother, using the customary methods of seduction, aided by the distinctive energy of his own personality. From the pen portraits of him left by Gasparino of Verona, and Girolamo Perzio, we know him for a tall, handsome man with black eyes and full lips, elegant, courtly, joyous, and choicely eloquent. His health and vigor were remarkable; such was his endurance, that he was said to be insensible to fatigue. Giasone Maino of Milan refers to his "elegant appearance, serene brow, royal glance, a countenance that at once expressed generosity and majesty, and the genial and heroic air with which his whole personality was in-

vested." Gasparino added to this, "all women upon whom he as much as casts his eyes he moves to love him; attracting them as the lodestone attracts iron." With these manifold attractions of body, he had small difficulty in making the beautiful Spanish widow his mistress, and enjoying her in all of the varied ways known to the adept lovers of the middle ages.

But bodily love, at times, has a desire to stray: and the young captain's eyes fell on the two daughters, both virginal, both lovely and both shaped for loving. He persuaded the mother that his erotic joy would be more complete, if she would summon her two daughters to participate in the amorous sport: and the mother consented, whether from hope of financial gain, passion for the handsome captain or mere lasciviousness, the record does not state. One by one the daughters were initiated into the veneric orgies; and he found his perverse nature pleased more than threefold by the arrangement.

He was not faithful to this family even at this time; but he preferred them to his other mistresses. Then, in 1455, occurred the elevation of his uncle to the papacy; and the astute Rodrigo saw in this elevation the key to the world's treasures. He at once wrote his uncle, or father, a letter of congratulation, in which he besought His Holiness to preserve his affection for the acquiescent nephew. Calixtus replied at once, ordering him to Rome, where important preferment in the church awaited him; and awarding him in the meantime a

benefice that brought an annual revenue of twelve thousand pounds. This sum, joined to Rodrigo's own income of thirty thousand ducats from family funds, enabled the young man to travel like a prince. The lovely Spanish widow had died shortly before; he placed her elder daughter in a convent, and kept the younger and more beautiful near him. Her name was Rosa Vannozza (Giovanna) dei Cattani: and, in the brief sketch of her life, she had three formal husbands, while continuing as the mistress of Rodrigo.

According to the letter of the Pope, Rodrigo came alone to Rome, installed himself in a magnificent palace, and became one of the most assiduous courtiers of the Pontiff, which naturally gave rise to strange rumors concerning the relationship between them. The path to preferment, he decided, lay in an apparent rigidity and austerity of morals: he did not, in this early Roman period, play the obvious Casanova, as he had done in Spain, and as he would do again in Rome, when the Roman Catholic world was kissing his feet. He acquired, with the general mass of people, the reputation of a holy man; and, at the same time, courted the pope so successfully, that his fortune at length became one of the largest in Rome.

What a joyful time Rodrigo, student debauchee, advocate of robbers and assassins, pillaging and incendiary soldier, lover of the lovely widow and her two daughters, had in playing the role of a holy man! He affected publicly the life of a veritable anchorite, or sacred hermit; in public, his hands were al-

ways crossed on his breast, and his eyes cast on the ground in gorgeous mock humility; his eloquence became oily and serious; he visited churches, hospitals, and the homes of the poor, scattering abundant alms, and murmuring shyly that at his death the poor should be his heirs. Added to this went a vehement public contempt for wealth, at the very time he was securing more and more from the pope. This facile role gave him the general name of a Solomon for wisdom, a Job for patience, and a Moses for fervor in broadcasting the law of the Lord. In private—must we tell the other side of the story as well? Let Pius II speak, in a reproving letter addressed two or three years later to the young cardinal:

Beloved Son:

When four days ago, in the gardens of Giovanni de Bichis, were assembled several women of Siena addicted to worldly vanity, your worthiness, little remembering the office which you fill, was entertained by them from the seventeenth to the twenty-second hour. . . . From what we heard, dancing was unrestrainedly indulged, and not one of love's attractions was absent, whilst your behavior was no different from that which might have been looked for in any worldly youth. Touching what happened there, modesty imposes silence. . . . The husbands, parents, brothers and relations of these young women were excluded, in order that your amusements should be the more unbridled.

Well, and did this paternal admonition reform our young cardinal? In the same year a son was born to Cardinal Rodrigo, who was named Don Pedro Luis de Borgia, by a spinster (*mulier soluta*) unnamed. This son was publicly acknowledged and cared for by the car-

dinal. Paul II came in as pope in 1464; and in 1467 a daughter—Girolama de Borgia—by another unnamed spinster, was born to the cardinal. In 1471 Sixtus the Fourth came in; and, by his beloved Rosa Vanozza, he proceeded to have these children: Giovanni (born 1474), Cesare (1476), Lucrezia (1480), and Geoffredo (1481 or 1482), and another who died when young. His children Isabella and Pier Luigi were of a still different parentage.

In 1484, Innocent the Eighth came in; and the morality of Rome did not improve noticeably. Under Sixtus IV, the tax levied upon the courtesans of Rome had enriched the papal coffers to the extent of more than twenty thousand ducats yearly. The new pope's vicar published in 1490 an edict against the universal concubinage practiced by the clergy, forbidding its continuation under pain of excommunication. At once the more practical Innocent severely censured his vicar, and canceled the edict.

During these four papal reigns, Rodrigo nourished a baffled ambition: for his desire had been to succeed his relative, Calixtus III, in the seat of St. Peter. Long ago he had written to Rose, his mistress, while she was in her retreat at Venice, where he could visit her at times without exciting suspicions:

> Rosa, my well beloved, imitate my example; remain chaste until it shall become in my power to reseek thee, and mingle our love in infinite pleasure. Let no other mouth profane thy charms, no other hand raise those veils which conceal my sovereign good; a little more patience, and he who is called my uncle will bequeath me the chair of St.

Peter as a heritage. In the mean time take great pains with the education of our children, for they are destined to govern people and kings.

The last phrase here, on first perusal, seems to cast suspicion upon the authenticity of this letter; although it may have referred to earlier children whose names we do not have. Or it may have been an addendum by another hand. The letter, in any case, is given as authentic by historians.

Calixtus died, and the suffrage went elsewhere, as we have seen: perhaps the very pretended austerity of Rodrigo drove away the support of those who misjudged him as a moralist, and desired to have the good old bagnio days continued. During a short time in the reign of Sixtus IV, tiring utterly of the pretended virtue, Rodrigo temporarily abandoned the cardinal's robes, returned to his life as a captain of adventurers, and committed in Spain so many murders and rapes, that Henry the Feeble, King of Castile, drove him out of the land. Well, if Spain was critical, Rome was not: so it was at this time that Rodrigo brought Rosa Vanozza and certain of his children by her from Venice to Rome. To keep up appearances in some slight way, he gave them a palace in a retired quarter. It seems clear that the pretty mistress went through the formality of marriage to some intendent of Rodrigo's, whether Count Ferdinand of Castile of Giorgio della Croce, is not certain. The records, however, show her to have married both of these men about 1480; and there is also a statement in the diaries of Infessura that she was married also by Rodrigo to one Do-

menico d'Arignano. From this mix-up, it may be, intended merely to cloak the amour, the *Britannica* gets its authority for stating that Vanozza had three husbands. It is not at all clear that she was ever in fact the wife of any one of them. Sabatini suggests, to the contrary, that della Croce's role was that of complacent husband, who permitted his wife to continue as the mistress of Rodrigo. In any case, the part played by these so-called husbands in the story is not essentially heroic.

A study of the papal archives shows how flagrantly nepotism and family influence played a part in the administration of the Holy See. In 1480, a bull from Sixtus IV excused Cesare Borgia, then in his sixth year, from proving his legitimacy: which thereby made him eligible to the highest churchly honors. Another bull, dated 1484, of the same pope, appointed Cesare treasurer of the Church of Carthage. At this time the young Borgia was in his ninth or tenth year: so it was that the heritage of the followers of the Nazarene was squandered by the titular head of Christendom. Other titles were placed on Cesare, before indeed he had begun to graduate from childish games; at times these were lent from out the stupendous store of Rodrigo, who had become the wealthiest prince of the church in the world.

In 1586, della Croce, the complacent husband, died; on June 6th of the same year, the Vanozza was married to another husband, one Carlo Canale, undoubtedly by the arrangement of Rodrigo.

At this time, the Saturnalia of the pontifical court, under Innocent the Eighth, is almost indescribable. Rome, says a contemporary historian, had become an immense brothel, with more than fifty thousand prostitutes. The streets and lanes were peopled with cut-throats and assassins, the roads were infested with banditti, and both had access to the palace of the pope. The minor debaucheries of Rodrigo passed unnoticed in the midst of this general corruption.

About this time, according to the records, Rosa Vanozza ended her relations with Rodrigo. It is at least certain that his two children by her then in Rome, the daughter Lucrezia and the son Geoffredo, left her to take up their residence with Adriana Orsini, at the Orsini Palace. Adriana was a cousin of Rodrigo's, whose son Orso Orsini from his early youth had been betrothed to Giulia Farnese, daughter of an obscure patrician family. Rodrigo, still disappointed in his ambition to reach the height of the Vatican, was now fifty-six. At the Orsini Palace he met the acquaintance of this fiancee of his nephew, and, caring nothing for the rights of others, at once became enamored of the beautiful golden-haired girl.

CHAPTER III

GIULIA FARNESE: THE VATICAN

Giulia Farnese at this time was nearly forty years younger than the cardinal; she was in her sixteenth year of exquisite bloom. Her reputation for surpassing beauty had given her the name of La Bella; she sat for Pinturicchio as the model for his Madonna in the Borgia Tower of the Vatican, and to Guglielmo della Porta for his statue of Truth which adorns the tomb of her brother Alessandro Farnese, who presently was to become Pope Paul III. What were the claims of the young Orso Orsini, when weighted with the ripe and eloquent blandishments of the richest churchman in the world? Whatever scruples she may have had vanished when her brother, the scapegrace Alessandro, committed some crime too hideous to be purchased away by the wide scale of papal indulgences. He came to Rodrigo, as the embodiment of the wealth and power of the church, for aid in securing a pardon. The Borgia nodded with cynical complacency: he could have asked nothing better. He would be glad to aid the young Farnese; in return, Alessandro could do him a favor—a slight one, of course: merely prostitute his sister, the belle Giulia, to the mature man's desires. With fine fraternal feeling, Alessandro agreed at once: and saw to it that his sister agreed to enroll

her name on the long roll of Rodrigo's mistresses.

The old pope, Innocent VIII, was still alive—being kept from death by the only food which could nourish him, woman's milk. And then, perhaps after the physician's unsuccessful use of the sanguine remedy from three boys of ten, the pope died.

At once the cardinals, knowing the state of the Roman streets and roads, quartered soldiers in their palaces, and planted cannon in the avenues leading to them. They assembled in conclave, guarding with horse and foot soldiers the suburbs adjoining the Vatican, and closing with enormous beams all the approaches to the sacred dwellings. The cardinals of Naples and of Lisbon were prominent contenders for the vacancy; the King of France had his own choice, and had deposited 200,000 ducats with a Roman banker to insure the election of his favorite. But Rodrigo, who had already secured the suffrages of several cardinals, delayed matters, and arranged at first for a majority, and then for a unanimous ballot in his favor. To some of the cardinals, say the historians, he gave palaces, to others castles, and money: the cardinal of St. Angelo claimed a cellar full of wine, as well as a bishopric and a fortress. One Venetian monk, who had obtained a cardinalate, sold his vote for five thousand ducats, and the promise of passing a night with Lucrezia, the daughter of Rodrigo. To this he consented; and, by the unanimous vote of the cardinals, he was eleva-

ted to the throne of St. Peter, as Pope Alexander the Sixth.

In the imposing procession to the Lateran, in which the new pope showed himself to the Romans, the Borgia arms were everywhere displayed—or, a grazing steer gules. To translate that from the heraldic into the colloquial, his arms showed a young red bull, grazing on a field of gold. The picture is not inappropriate.

War clouds were threatening Italy at the time, involving the fortunes of Alexander VI, as we must henceforth call him; calmly he strengthened his alliances, engaged mercenaries, went about accompanied by a body fence a king would envy and continued to sip of the joys of earth. The records do not definitely say that his daughter Lucrezia paid her part in the bargain which elevated the Borgia to the pontificate; but Alexander VI was no man to go back on promises, which it did not hurt him to keep: and he suffered no essential loss in the transaction. For, even before his mistress Rosa Vannozza had left his establishment as a regular incumbent, we are informed by the most reliable contemporary authorities that the Borgia Bull had added his own daughter Lucrezia to the ranks of his mistresses, and had passed whole nights in orgies with her mother, the Vannozza, and their daughter. Since Alexander VI had also enjoyed Rosa's mother in earlier days, this made three generations that had contributed to his pleasure.

Among the first acts of the new pontiff was the elevation of his bastards to high posts of

honor. Cesare was made a cardinal and archbishop of Valencia, in Spain; Giovanni was given the post of Duke of Gandia and Prince of Beneventum, succeeding in the former position Pedro Luis de Borgia, the Bull's son by another mistress, who had meantime died. These honors were but the beginning of the dazzling careers which the pope foresaw for his children: the sovereignty of Naples, Venice, Florence, all Italy was little enough for him, Alexander VI certainly did not neglect his children.

After unsuccessful preliminary negotiations, Alexander VI won the consent of the new King of Naples to the marriage between his youngest daughter and Geoffredo Borgia. The marriage was celebrated with a pomp which emptied the papal treasury; whereupon taxes were increased, and the threadbare device of a new crusade against the Turks was invoked, which as usual brought from the duped people vast sums to the Vatican, which were spent, not on a war to regain the Holy Sepulchre, but on the licentious displays of the pope and his crescent offspring.

At this same time occurred the discovery of America by the Italian navigator Columbus, for the flag of Spain; and the prompt claim, on behalf of Portugal, to part of the new territories. Alexander VI was made the mediator, and drew the line of demarcation which held good for many years. No sooner was this settled, than the pope was called upon to pass upon the marriage of his daughter, Lucrezia, to Giovanni Sforza, the handsome weakling who

was Lord of Pesaro and Cotignola. Alexander was anxious for this union, to cement his political ambitions still further; he was at the time desperately enamored of the lovely Giulia Farnese, and so he conducted the marriage negotiations to a successful conclusion. Lucrezia, from her childhood, had been betrothed to a gentleman from Arragon; with an imperial gesture the pope canceled this contract, and presided over the marriage ceremony.

Infessura describes the wedding for us:

> At this marriage took place fetes and orgies worthy of Madame Lucrezia. In the evening His Holiness, the cardinal Borgia (Cesare), the Duke of Gandia (Giovanni), some courtiers, and several noble ladies supped together, at which play actors and female dancers appeared, who represented obscene plays, to the great joy of the guests.

The recital of the remaining transactions cannot be reproduced in English. Inquisitive readers are referred to the original by Infessura, for the malodorous details.

Lucrezia, at this time, was only fourteen years of age, with blue eyes and golden hair, and the rare personal beauty that was a Borgia heritage. She moved out of the Orsini palace, and not long thereafter the lovely Giulia brother was given the red hat, no doubt partly as a reward of his complicity in the pope's liaison with his sister. This elevation caused some scandal, and Alessandro received the nickname of Cardinal of the Petticoat, to remind him of the origin of his churchly honors. The Pope next turned to the erection and beautification of the Borgia Tower to the Vatican; over the door of

one of the rooms Pinturicchio painted a picture of the Virgin Mary, in the likeness of Giulia Farnese, the mistress of the Pope, where the virgin spouse of Jehovah is still revered by adoring believers.

And yet, the marriage of Lucrezia had not removed her from the father whom historians accuse of continuing incest with her. She refused to go with the Lord of Pesaro to his principality, and lived as before she had lived for a brief time, in the Vatican itself. Burchard, the master of ceremonies to Alexander, who has left an invaluable diary of the doings of these days, wrote:

> She no longer quitted the apartments of the Holy Father, by day or by night.

In spite of this evidence from an author whom he frequently quotes with approval, Sabatini sloshes the whitewash on the infamous Lucrezia so liberally, that he paints her as a sort of saint on earth. This would be astonishing, considering her parentage and her upbringing; in view of the historical evidence, it is pathetically absurd.

The Pope was so infatuated with the daughter, that he granted her anything she desired, even to the superintendence of the government of the church. She was present when the letters were opened and the official business was dispatched; and, to quote de Cormenin:

> She convoked the sacred college (of cardinals), and frequently, at the close of the orgies, she presided over the council of the cardinals in the cos-

tume of a bacchante, with naked bosom, and her body scarcely covered by a muslin robe. In this condition she deliberated on subjects of licentiousness, and was not ashamed to give and receive, before them, caresses so immodest, that Burchard himself, habituated as he was to so many of such things, exclaims, in recording it, "Horror! Ignominy! Disgrace!"

It would be interesting to hear Sabatini explain how he faithfully follows Burchard in excusing Alexander VI from the murder of the Moslem prince Zizim, and in many other places where the words of the master of ceremonies do not reflect on the Borgias; and how at the same time he can utterly ignore this testimony of an eye-witness to the scandalous conduct of Lucrezia with her papal and blood father, and hold that the daughter was purer than thrice filtered water.

His Holiness, at this time, was engaged in repairing the wretched state of the papal and Borgia finances. He and his son Cesare, the cardinal, exhibited the family greatness by discovering a new and surpassing method of refilling the treasury of the Vatican. They published a law, declaring that the Holy See was the heir of members of the Sacred College of cardinals; then they sold the cardinalships to the richest Romans, and proceeded to poison them, in order to sell the titles again. Alexander also carried on a large trade in crucifixes, relics and indulgences; he also sold through his datary ecclesiastical dignities, employments and benefices, without troubling himself whether they were vacant or not: if not, poison or the dagger soon persuaded the tardy occupant that

the Holy See had decided upon a change of personnel.

In many public ceremonials, Lucrezia's husband, Giovanni Sforza, was conspicuous in public in close association with the pontiff and his court. Yet early in 1497 he fled, abruptly and precipitately, from his lovely and abandoned wife—a flight which has never been adequately explained. Lucrezia's reported grievance upon the matter was that the Lord of Posaro "did not fittingly keep her company," which you may construe as you will: that they were inharmonious; or that he failed in his duty as husband; or that he could not keep up with her boundless lasciviousness. The second of these explanations was later adopted by Alexander VI, when he desired an excuse to free his daughter from the marriage, for the purpose of contracting another; the third may have played its part. All that we know positively is that, one evening in Holy Week, Sforza mounted a Turkish horse, and, on the pretext of going as far as the Church of Sant' Onofrio to take the air, he slipped out of Rome, rode desperately and steadily, and twenty-four hours later, jaded and dispirited, he dismounted from the steed in his home town of Pesaro. As he staggered from the saddle, the overtasked horse dropped dead.

There is one story of the flight, not fully authenticated, which Sabatini repeats. This is that told by Almerici, and is to the effect that Lucrezia permitted Sforza's chamberlain to be concealed behind a screen in her apartment, when her Cesare, Cardinal of Valencia, entered

and told his sister freely that an order had been issued for her husband's death. By this means, according to the story, Lucrezia had her weakling husband warned, and this caused the precipitate retreat. A little later, Lucrezia left the Vatican temporarily and retired to the Convent of San Sisto, in the Appian Way—a step which immediately gave rise to the wildest gossip.

Additional honors were soon piled upon the cardinal; he prepared to go as papal legate to the court of Naples, to crown the new king. He was to have been accompanied on this expedition by his brother Giovanni, the Duke of Gandia. This was the Pope's plan; but it was halted by perhaps the darkest tragedy which was associated with the name of Borgia.

CHAPTER IV

LUCREZIA BORGIA

Giovanni had come to Rome, to receive from the pontiff the dukedom of Benevento, and the lordships of Terracina and Pontecorvo. He rode into Rome on a magnificent horse, glittering with gold and precious stones, and surrounded by an escort of rich lords, barons and princes, as if he had been a pope or an emperor. Cardinal Cesare, never pleased at honors that went elsewhere than upon his own head, was dark with jealousy at this display, and the new honors. To add to his fury, say the historians, his sister Lucrezia turned from the cardinal to bestow all of her incestuous caresses upon the Duke of Gandia. It may have been at her suggestion that the Pope decided that she was to accompany Giovanni to Spain, after his return from the Neapolitan coronation. In any case, it was not healthy for man, pope or stableman, to cross the imperious Cesare.

Just before the intended departure for Naples, Giovanni supped with his mother, Rosa Vannozza. As he was leaving the house, he was set upon by four men in masks, pierced with nine blows of a dagger, and his body thrown into Tiber.

Cesare had been at the supper also, and had parted from his brother afterwards near the Jewish quarter. Here the Duke of Gandia had dismissed his attendants, except a mysterious

masked man; with him Giovanni had ridden away toward the quarter, saying that he was "going elsewhere to amuse himself." On the next day, the horse was found first, wandering about the streets; then the masked servant's body was discovered, mortally wounded and beyond speech. A boatman named Giorgio was next discovered, who told of seeing a horseman, with four men on foot, bring a body to the river banks, and throw it in. Perceiving a dark object floating, which they identified as the victim's cloak, the men had thrown stones at it, until it sank. All this was repeated by the boatman to the Pope.

"Why did you not report this at once?" fumed the ruler of Christendom.

"Your Holiness, in my time I have seen more than a hundred bodies thrown into Tiber; and I never heard yet that it was an honest man's duty to report such a thing."

This story, and Gandia's continued absence, threw the Pope into a frenzy. He ordered that the bed of the river be searched, foot by foot. Hundreds of boatmen and fishermen, spurred by the offered reward, got to work; and at length one of the nets brought up the body of the murdered nobleman. His money and jewels were still intact, which showed that the purpose had not been robbery.

Where was Cesare Borgia, all this time? Early the next morning, he had departed for Naples,—although without his brother, who was supposed to have accompanied him. This precipitate departure at once hinted that he might have had a hand in the murder. The Pope, pas-

sionately fond of all his bastards, lamented hysterically; for three days and nights he would neither eat nor sleep. Yet, when reports reached him that Cesare was suspected, he had search made in all the brothels of the city and elsewhere for the assassins. The report was circulated that this had been done by Giovanni Sforza, Lucrezia's absent husband, to repay the Pope for the plotted murder of that adopted member of the family. Moreover, the Pope chose the names of illustrious Roman noblemen by lot, and had them put to the torture, in the hope that God would thus reveal the murderer. He did not desist from this, until he was certain that his son Cesare was responsible. We quote Burchard, Sabatini's witness, for the next step:

> Then he burst into tears, and consoled himself in the arms of Madame Lucrezia, one of the causes of the murder.

It was an unfortunate hour for his reliability as a historian, when Sabatini attempted in the same study to extol Burchard as a witness, and to maintain that Lucrezia was a little purer than Ivory Soap.

Rumor had temporarily lighted upon Geoffredo Borgia, a still younger son; it was true that a motive was not wanting. For the royal wife of Geoffredo had been prodigal in her favors; and had conducted an incestuous affaire with the Duke of Gandia. After investigating this, the Pope publicly exonerated this son from complicity in the crime. Three months after the murder, the Pope formally dissolved the marriage of his daughter and the Lord of

Pesaro, stating as a reason that the husband was impotent and of a frigid nature, and could not consummate the marriage. To the Italians of that day, this charge must have provoked ribald laughter. Not that they believed it: the reasons assigned in state, and especially in papal, documents, were known to be such as the occasion demanded. In any case, Giovanni Sforza at once answered the inaccurate charge by letting the whole tribe of cats out of the Vatican bag. He told publicly of the wholesale incest of the Borgias.

Cesare, meanwhile, had determined to abandon his ecclesiastical career. Waiting until the murder of the Duke of Gandia had blown over the fickle Roman minds, he returned from Naples, and presented himself before His Holiness, as if nothing of note had occurred in his absence. Alexander received him with the same demonstrations of affection that he had always given him, and consented to free the son from his ecclesiastical vows, which were not yet considered irrevocable. If they had been riveted of Median steel, no doubt Borgian ingenuity would have found some easy way to circumvent them. This act of Cesare's at once, instead of stilling rumors of his responsibility for Giovanni's death, accentuated them.

Before the Sacred College, Alexander Vi blamed his own evil ways of living for the death of his murdered son. This is significant enough, when we recall the particulars of that evil living. To celebrate his reconciliation with his father, Cesare was desirous of giving him

the diversion of a hunting party, as a further method of making him forget the murder of Giovanni. Both started for Ostia, accompanied by couriers, prostitutes, minions and jugglers, and guarded by more than a thousand horse and foot. Says Tomasso Thomasi, reporting the occasion:

> They passed four whole days in the woods of Ostia, taking pleasure in surpassing debauchery and licentiousness, all that the most depraved imagination could invent, after which they returned to that Rome which they had rendered a cavern of brigands, a sanctuary of iniquity. It would be impossible to relate all the murders, rapes, and incests which were daily committed at the court of the Pope, and scarcely would the life of a man be long enough to allow him to transcribe the names of the victims who were stabbed, poisoned, or cast alive into the Tiber.

The conclusion sounds a bit overdrawn; but conditions could hardly have been overdrawn, if universal contemporary history hold any truth.

Burchard, Sabatini's impeccable witness, gives us a picture of the bloodthirsty and incestuous days:

> It was so great a pleasure for him (Cesare) to see blood flow, that following the example of the Emperor Commodus, he exercised himself with killing, in order to keep up his tiger rage. One day he enclosed the square of St. Peter with palisades, and ordered his guards to bring into the enclosure prisoners of war, men, women, and children. He then commenced a horrid contest with these unfortunate persons, they bound with cords, he armed at all points, mounted on a fierce courser. He shot some, hacked others with blows of his sabre, trampled some under his horse's feet, and in less than half an hour he caracoled alone in a sea of blood,

and in the midst of dead bodies, whilst His Holiness and Madame Lucrezia were taking their pastime in a balcony, by assisting in this horrid scene.

And Burchard, Sabatini constantly tells us, is a reliable witness. If this conduct of Cesare's can be called sanity, there are many who will rejoice in claiming themselves something else. It sounds like a horrid and withering blood madness: and the whole glorious greedy course of the Borgias reads like a study in the varied manias.

The monarchs of Spain at this time protested against a papal indulgence for a marriage between the daughter of the King of Naples and a son of the foolish King John of Portugal. Desirous of wriggling out of the situation, the Borgias accused the Archbishop of Cozenza with having traitorously forged the dispensation. In spite of his protests, the prelate was imprisoned, despoiled of his garments, left barefoot, and reduced to a diet of bread and water. These hardships forced him to sign a confession, on condition that he would be restored to his former honors, and to the friendship of the Pope. With the confession once locked in his archives, the pontiff taught the archbishop what the friendship of the Borgias amounted to. According to Sabatini, the archbishop was starved to death, other historians, closer to the event, say that he was poisoned by Cesare.

The son was now sent as papal legate, to convey to the King of France a dissolution of his marriage; and, by the way, to plead his own suit for marriage with the daughter of the

King of Naples. Just before his departure, the pope's plans for the death of the dauntless Savonarola had been successful; and this martyred opponent of papal and royal inquity was burned alive with two of his supporters by subservient Florence. In Rome, at this time, the Pope was celebrating, by appropriate orgies, the baptism of his latest bastard, this time the lovely Giulia Farnese being the mother. On this occasion the Pope caused to be placed on the right side of the high altar of the Church Ste. Marie del Popolo a magnificent portrait of Rosa Vanozza, which was exposed for the veneration of the faithful, instead of the accustomed picture of the Virgin Mary. Alexander VI, say his defenders, was always especially reverent toward the mother of Jesus, the queen of Chastity.

Madame Lucrezia was also married at this time to young Alfonso, Duke of Bisaglia, a natural son of Alfonso II, Duke of Arragon. All went well with Cesare's trip to the King of France, except his plea for the hand of Carlotta. Both the Kings of France and of Naples were upset by the girl's stubborn refusal; and Naples, to prevent a possible papal alliance with Venice, wrote to the Pope, offering instead to invest Cesare with two principalities. But the French monarch came forward with a more attractive alternative, offering Cesare his choice of either of two women about the French court who would make an adequate Duchess, the king's niece, or Charlotte d'Albret, a daughter of the Duc de Guyenne, and sister to the King of Navarre. Cesare's choice fell

upon Charlotte, seventeen years of age, and said to have been the most beautiful maid in France. The marriage took place, France, Venice, and the Pope sealed their alliance, which excluded Naples, and Cesare and the pious young duchess spent a few amorous months together.

And then the trumpets of war blared out, and Louis of France and Cesare started south against the Italian cities. Sabatini's picture of Cesare's parting with his wife is too amusing to be as historically detestable as it is.

> The pity of it! Ambition-driven, to fulfill the destiny expected of him, he turned his back upon that pleasant land of Dauphiny, where the one calm little season of his manhood had been spent, where happiness and peace might have been his portion had he remained.

And this of Cesare Borgia, initiated from his youth by his father into Gomorran practices; frequenter of brothels; seducer of girls and wives; adulterous and incestuous partner of his sister's revels; bloodthirsty monster, who could slaughter bound men, women, and children with terrific speed in the very court of the Vatican, while his father the Pope and his sister the dissolute were enjoying the spectacle as a sadistic sauce to their amorous set-to! The modern practice of calcimining the truth has, perhaps, certain elements of merit: but when it goes so far as to paint pirates as Sunday School superintendents, and the Borgias as peace-loving lilies, the falsification has gone too far. There is no need of exaggeration in the other direction: nor does the tabulation

of acts considered crimes today, against men and women of former days who found these acts not out of keeping with their day, imply any more reproach, than the general one, which is more an amazement at the sanguine and cruel roots out of which modern man sprang, the once common evils suppressed inside the inmost nature of each of us.

There were primitive peoples once who consumed their parents, as a sacred duty; there were parents who murdered their children, as a divine sacrifice; there were mothers who threw their suckling infants to the Nile crocodiles, or under the murderous wheels of the Juggernaut car; there were girls who lay with every passerby in Babylon, as the moral method of raising a marriage portion; there were men and women near at home who burned Quakers to death in New England, and killed innocents as witches. These things were the best these people could do, in their state of vision. The Borgias came into a world professing to follow the teachings of the Nazarene carpenter, which are gentle in many of their aspects, and only violent when directed against the rich, or those in theological power, or those of his own family: never violent against the mere sinner, or against other men for greed's or ambition's sake. But this world of the Borgias, which paid lip-toll to the Nazarene teachings, paid no attention to them in practice. If Pope Alexander VI, if the Cardinal of Valencia his son, had ever sought to live as Christians, they would have been deprived of their dignities, and committed to a madhouse;

or, if they had taken a violent stand against the wholesale abuses of their century, there is Savonarola's fate to be remembered, and that of the mild and beautiful inhabitants of the Vaudois valley, some five thousand of whom were brutally butchered by a Pope of Rome while the Borgia father was high at the court of St. Peter.

The Borgias were not insane for righteousness: they were merely energetic and preeminent exponents of the morality of their own time. Let us grant this, and get the story as it occurred; leaving attempts to pallidify their red stain on the crimson tale of history to those who prefer not to know the way, and the truth: for the price of treachery to the truth, as a man knows or sees it, is death.

CHAPTER V

MISCELLANEOUS LOVES

Without real opposition, France and Cesare took Milan, which the French king claimed, from the vaccilating Sforza. The most resplendent figure in the triumphal entry into the Italian city was the Pope's son, who rode at the King's side. From this time on, Cesare signed himself "Cesare Borgia of France." He quartered the golden lilies of France with the red bull of the Borgias on his shield: although he was never again to trample over the golden lily, as she was pictured, whom he had left behind in the land of Dauphiny.

The rulers of Forli determined to meet the Pope's declaration of war against them by poisoning His Holiness with a hollow cane, and by other means. The bearers of the poison were tortured, confessed, and were appropriately treated. Cesare now qualified as an adequate soldier, taking two towns with much personal audacity, and receiving a triumph, or its equivalent, on his return to Rome.

Lucrezia had now been married for two years to Alfonso of Aragon, the natural son of the former king of Naples, the nephew of the reigning king. He was a handsome boy of seventeen at the time of the match, and was one year younger than the sophisticated widow whom he married. On the night of July 15, 1900, Alfonso was assaulted and grievously

wounded on the steps of St. Peter's. He had been invited to Rome by the Holy Father himself; the assassins had struck five blows with their daggers, and then hurried off, thinking he was dead. His strong constitution permitted him to recover, and drag himself into the Vatican. His Holiness, hearing the noise, had medical aid rendered to him, after the Cardinal of Capua had given him the rites given men at the point of death. Let Burchard continue the story:

> The physicians who received all the lamentations of the Pope as serious, took so much pains with the wounded man, that they saved his life. As Alfonso was convalescing, not having died from the wound he had taken, he was yesterday strangled by masked men in the Vatican, in his bed, at the nineteenth hour.

The report of the Venetian ambassador laid the blame on the accomplished slayer, Cesare; other accounts say that Alfonso had plotted the death of the son of the Pope, and that the murder was done in retaliation. The motive may have lain deeper, as many historians state. At this time, Cesare thought of urging the King of France to war against Naples; and the marriage of Lucrezia to a son of that reigning house was an obstacle to this plan. An obstacle, to the Borgias, was a thing to be removed. The murder took place within the Vatican itself; the assault, on its steps. The thing points with unmistakable emphasis to Cesare and the aged Pope.

Whereupon Cesare turned again to his Italian campaign, meeting with general success, and a stay only before the town of Faenza. Here

Cesare was accused, apparently without reason beyond his general reputation, of the abduction of Dorotea Caracciolo, the wife of a Venetian captain. The dignified answer of Cesare to the accusation is a significant commentary upon the nature of the man. He assured the Venetian authorities that he had not found the ladies of the Romagna so difficult, that he should be driven to employ such rude and violent measures. Apparently he was really innocent of this charge; but his amorous experiences with the women of the Romagna, as indicated in his reply, was neither slight nor disappointing.

The siege of Faenza continued, with constant ups and downs. The town was defended by Astorre Manfredi, a youth of sixteen, of remarkable beauty. Their young lord was a favorite with all of the people of the city: so much so, that it was stated that their defense would be broken at once if the young Manfredi were sent out of the city, for his own safety. Cesare, far from his wife, was not far from women: let Sabatini, his arch defender, speak on the matter:

> With him one woman was as another woman; as he craved women, so he took women, but with an almost contemptuous indiscrimination. For all his needs concerning them the lupanaria sufficed.

Of course, the papal lupanarias, or houses of prostitution under the authority of the Popes, were too far from Faenza to satisfy Cesare's immediate needs: but he found some way of finding girls or wives complacent enough to

desire an alliance, however temporary, with the brilliant Borgia.

And now the siege of Faenza reached its conclusion. The city had long been half starved; the citizens, faithful to the young Manfredi, had offered their resources to the uttermost, in many cases; the women had offered themselves to carry to the ramparts the heavy stones that were to be hurled down upon the besiegers, and to act as sentries; many of the priests had melted down the sacred vessels, in this conflict against God's vicar upon earth. At last the Borgia cannon tore through the walls, and Cesare delivered a terrible assault againts the weakened defenses. Terms were at length offered, by which the city would yield to Cesare, if he would agree to accept the submission without entering, without indemnity, and without harming the young Manfredi, who was to be permitted to depart, taking with him all his movable possessions. To these terms Cesare gave his oath: whereupon the surrender was consummated.

One of the principles of statecraft of Machiavelli was:

> In order to preserve a newly acquired State, particular attention should be given to two points. In the first place, care should be taken entirely to extinguish the family of the ancient sovereign.

Manfredi and his bastard brother, Gianevangelista, were welcomed by Cesare: and he had given his oath not to harm them—the oath of a Borgia. The youth was rather sickly and melancholy; but Cesare, who found that women did not oppose his desires, conceived a pas-

sion for the young man. He proceeded to make Manfredi minister to his desire. Until his return to Rome, two months later, he kept the desired Manfredi near his person. When he returned to Rome, he presented to the Pope, his father, Manfredi, his natural brother, and another child, to be used in the pontiff's debaucheries. When Alexander VI had tired of sport with them, the bodies of the three young men were thrown into the Tiber. They had made life a little pleasanter for the head of Christendom and his militant son—what more could they desire of life?

Of course, Cesare had pledged his word that Manfredi would go free. But, as the son of the Pope, any offense that he committed was pardonable at once; and, in this instance, he chose to break his word, and enjoy his pleasure. The fact that Alexander VI was seventy-two years old at the time does not make the offense any the lighter. The prelate was still potent and energetic. Requests came from the Kings of Hungary and Portugal, the first desiring to repudiate his lawful wife, the second desiring permission to contract an incestuous marriage. Both requests were supported by rich sums of money; and with a cynical sigh the great Borgia granted both. Soon after this session, in a sudden storm a bolt of lightning entered the room, knocked down the ceiling under which the Pope was standing, and killed the three bishops to whom the pontiff was at the moment giving his attention. Alexander was not killed: the beam and rafter formed a sort of dais above his head. He was severely

bruised, but escaped with his life. How else could the people accept this, than as a direct miracle of God—a testimonial of the heavenly father in favor of his great earthly son, and an implicit ratification of the murders, ravishments, incests, and other activities in which Alexander had so long indulged? If God punished for impious conduct, here was his supreme opportunity, the faithful must have reasoned: his sparing of the Pope's sacred body showed an ally in the Pope far more potent than France or Spain.

Alexander, for all of his more than seventy years, recovered promptly from his wounds, and at once proclaimed a new crusade against the Turks, imposing a tax of a tenth of their revenues upon all in Christendom. Fortunate indeed was it for the Vatican that there was always this excuse, when funds ran low! The modern man of power, needing a little extra spending money, secures it by adding a few cents to the price of a gallon of gasoline, or whatever his weapon of power may be: God's vicar unfailingly turned to a new crusade against the Turks. No matter how often the stale excuse was repeated, the gullible mob poured their treasures popeward.

These new funds were sufficient to equip Cesare again with additional troops, for his projected campaign against Naples. He had finally engineered an agreement between the Kings of France and Spain, by which the Neapolitan kingdom should be shared by the greedy rulers. Cesare himself led his troops to the sack of Capua—and another jewel had been

added to the Borgia crown. The cannon battered a breach into the wall, a traitor opened a gait: the besiegers stormed in, to meet a stubborn resistance. Where was the sometime Borgia charity on this occasion? No one was spared in the carnage which followed. The invader, Cesare, with his army butchered every human thing that he came upon, caring nothing for age or sex, until the blood of more than four thousand victims flowed down the Capuan gutters. Burchard describes briefly the slaughter:

> After the Capuan traitor was killed by Cesare's forces, the same fate was met by some three thousand foot and some two hundred horse soldiers, by citizens, priests, conventuals of both sexes, even in the very churches and monasteries, and all the women taken were given in prey to the greatest cruelty. The total number of the slain is estimated at four thousand.

Priests murdered at their altars, monks killed in their monasteries, nuns, girls, wives, grandmothers deflowered, violated, treated to every sadistic humiliation, and then bestially slaughtered—it is a pretty picture which Cesare Borgia has left upon the pages of history. What a pity that he had not stayed in Dauphiny, to live out the peaceful life which Sabatini implies he craved so profoundly! You may be sure that the commander did not fail to enjoy his share of the butchery, and of the ravishments.

Burchard is only one of the many authorities who state that thirty of the most beautiful women were sent to Rome. Other historians

say that the number was forty. Guicciardini, the elegant Florentine historian, says that Cesare picked out the forty most beautiful, and retained them for his own uses. This was not to stock a harem, in the way that Solomon or an Eastern potentate would have acted; the young women were subjected for a brief time to all the amorous cruelties that Cesare could think of, and their bruised and murdered bodies were then flung into the Tiber, which closed quietly over this eloquent testimonial to the greatness of the red-handed Cesare Borgia.

Soon after the return to Rome, the betrothal of Lucrezia was announced to a third prospective husband, Alfonso d'Este, son of Duke Ercole (Hercules) of Ferrara. The same time marked the publication of a papal bull against two ancient Roman families, the Savelli and the Colonna, who had offended the Pope by their independence. Their estates were divided between Lucrezia's son, Roderigo, and a child, Giovanni Borgia, who is something of a mystery, but was apparently another son of the Pope. Of course, such wholesale theft, in the name of the Church of Christ, violated the Mosaic commandment and the whole spirit of Christianity: it was a gross abuse of the offense called nepotism, or the grant of official favors to one's relatives. Burchard's statement concerning the young Giovanni was that he was the child of the Pope and "a certain Roman woman"; two papal bulls were published on the same day concerning him, one stating that he was Cesare Borgia's son, and

one that he was Alexander's. There was evidently some uncertainty about the matter.

The marriage contract for the third wedding of Lucrezia was duly signed in Ferrara, and afforded the Pope intense satisfaction. He was allying himself, by this marriage, to one of the most ancient families in Italy, occupying one of its noblest thrones. The marriage, of course, was a sordid marriage of convenience. Love between the contracting parties did not enter into the transaction; the father of the prospective bridegroom had the double motive of shadowing, to some extent, Cesare's growing magnificence; and of exacting as high a price as he could for the alliance of his ancient race with these bloody and greedy Borgias. Nor would Ercole send the escort to Rome, for the bride, until he had in his hand the papal Bull of investiture in the estates of Cento and Pieve, which he was to receive, in addition to a dowry of 100,000 ducats. Let the Turks tremble—here was apparently the need for another crusade to be proclaimed against them! That they rarely even heard about such crusades was not the least humorous element of the religious farce.

There is in the records a letter from the Ferrarese ambassador at Rome to the ruler of Ferrara, which casts an interesting light on the situation. According to this, Alexander VI reminds the nobleman that Lucrezia's first husband, who had been divorced for his alleged impotence, is now in Mantua. The Pope expresses the wish that d'Este will see to it that this man is not allowed in Ferrara at the time

of the wedding. For, notwithstanding his own "free confession" of the truth of the cause stated—an egregious political and papal fabrication, of course, the very reverse of the facts—"it is possible," continues the letter, "that he may still be actuated by some lingering ill-will." No one knew better than the Pope how bitter this ill-will was: had not the Sforza published to the world the indiscreet truth about the Pope's continuing incest with his own sons and daughters, and their multiple incests with each other? The ambassador humbly hints that, if she saw the Sforza, Madame Lucrezia might be compelled to withdraw into privacy, "to be spared the memory of the past." If the Borgias allowed themselves the luxury of regret for the past, this might well have been; but, like all energetic people, they may have adopted the sounder maxim of Lady Macbeth, What's done cannot be undone.

There were more things to be done, before the Borgias were finished.

CHAPTER VI

THE END OF THE JOYS

The festivities connected with the betrothal of Lucrezia and her third prospective husband proceeded merrily, with Cesare at hand to share in them. The Pope had paid a visit of state to Cesare's new conquests, attended by his courtiers, panders, minions, and mistresses. His plan was to declare Cesare king of these new domains, as soon as he could get sufficient support to do so. The historian Gordon adds one offense to the Holy Father's conduct which has not been encountered before:

> These reunions could not fail, with a Borgia, to degenerate into orgies, so that licentiousness was soon carried to its utmost limits. At supper they did not hesitate to eat flesh, though it was in Lent, only His Holiness baptised the poultry and game by the names of turbot and sturgeon.

Lent-breaking must now be added to the pontiff's crimes: unless indeed the papal baptism actually turned capon and venison into fish. Let us not add one unproved assertion to the roll of Borgia turpitude: there is at least a chance that, by miraculous intervention, His Holiness was not guilty of the heinous offense of Lent-breaking.

In order to clear the way for the installation of Cesare as King of Romagna, of the March, and of Ombria, the Pope gave the government of Spoleto to Lucrezia; the duchy of Sermona

to a bastard, named Giovanni Borgia; and then proceeded to the marriage of Lucrezia with Alfonso d'Este, son of the ruler of Ferrara.

Unfortunately, when Sabatini approaches this period, he states that his pet authority, Burchard's diary, contains two entries which "the sane mind must recoil and close up before, so impossible does it seem to accept them." These two statements, of course, are in consonance with the whole story of the Borgias, and need not worry anyone but the man determined to call coal white, the Iscariot the protector of the Nazarene, and the Borgias fairies dancing upon the Roman green. The first episode narrated by Burchard relates to a supper given by Cesare to fifty courtesans. Let us quote Burchard:

> This union (Lucrezia's marriage) was celebrated by Saturnalia which had never yet been equalled. His Holiness supped with his cardinals and the great dignitaries of his court, each having by his side two courtesans, who had no other dresses than muslin robes and garlands of flowers. When the repast was over, the courtesans, to the number of fifty, performed lascivious dances, at first alone, then with the cardinals. Finally, at a signal from Madame Lucrezia, their robes fell off, and the dances continued amid great applause from the Holy Father.

This is only part of the picture. The historian Gordon gives it all; de Cormenin refuses to translate further. Sabatini tells how Burchard goes on to draw a picture of those fifty women on all fours, in all their plastic nudity, striving for chestnuts flung to them in that chamber of the Apostolic Palace by Christ's Vicar—an

old man of seventy—and by his son and daughter. What comes after this Sabatini gives only in the Latin—a harmless account of the erotic contests given, with use of the sacred insignia, and the awarding of gifts to the victors.

Gregorovius doubts if Lucrezia could conceivably have been *there*—though, of course, Burchard was present, and Gregorovius was not. Sabatini accepts this, and begs leave to remove the Pope from the party. Other apologists for Cesare, each cardinal concerned, each dignitary, and each courtesan, may well abstract them one by one, until only Burchard the unimaginative historian actually remained. This is, of course, in pleasant sport: Burchard, so reliable elsewhere (see Sabatini for a continuing endorsement), was accurate on this occasion. Nor was this grossness a thing strange to the time and the people involved: at the Carnival, on the steps of St. Peter, masks of Priapus were still worn.

The next entry in Burchard to which Sabatini objects tells how certain peasants entered Rome driving two mares laden with timber; whereupon, the Pope's servants ran out, cut loose the lumber, and loosed four stallions upon them, while the Pope and Madame Lucrezia enjoyed the ensuing spectacle with laughter and delight. Gregorovius, it may be stated in passing, accepts both stories as true, except for the presence of Lucrezia in the one case. Both of these stories found place in the *Letter to Silvio Savelli*, published at that very time in Germany, and circulated throughout Europe —a magnificent indictment of papal and Bor-

gian eroticism and wickedness. It is all very well for defenders of the Borgias to exclaim against this letter; let them exclaim, if they will, against Burchard's account—and his daily duties at the Vatican made him the unexcelled eye-witness of the events he narrated—of the application of Peter Mendozza, then Cardinal of Valencia, for permission from His Holiness to take one of his bastards, named Zanet, as his minion. "He must be a good prince," said Alexander VI on this occasion, "and we cannot in conscience refuse to our subjects an authority which we have so often taken to ourselves." There you have the bulk of the charge against the chief of the Borgias admitted in his own words.

The Pope needed great additional funds to provide for Cesare's plan to obtain the kingdom of Romagna; and he found it difficult to persuade more of the Roman cardinals to attend the dinners of the Vatican. Twenty-one cardinals had died in eleven years, including the enormously wealthy Cardinal of Modena. There were definite charges current that the Borgias had poisoned four or more of these. The cardinals now found excuses to absent themselves from the table of His Holiness. Whereupon, with Borgia astuteness, Alexander VI tried a new tack. He borrowed from the Cardinal Corneto his villa for a grand festival which he wished to give his friends, asking the cardinal to have the meal prepared; the Pope promising to repay all that was spent. This succeeded marvelously; the invitations were all accepted.

On the morning of the day selected for the feast, according to the bulk of the contemporary historians, Alexander sent his steward to arrange the feast, and sent with him two bottles of that scented Italian wine called the wine of the Borgias. It was August, and warm; and Alexander and Cesare, who arrived on foot, called for some refreshment. A servant went to the pantry, and, as the steward was absent, he took up a bottle of wine and offered it to the Pope to drink. Alexander, as was his custom, emptied his glass at one draft; Cesare poured some water into his glass, and drank it. Scarcely had they set down the glasses, when both felt excruciating pains in the bowels: they were poisoned! The domestic had served to them the wine which the steward had so carefully set aside. The Holy Father was soon seized with frightful convulsions, was carried to his palace, and died during the night,. August 18, 1503. Cesare, by virtue of his more virile constitution, recovered. The moment that the Pope died, he had the doors of the Vatican locked, and appropriated to himself the gold, silver, and precious stones in the apostolic treasury.

There is a milder story, which has the authority of Burchard behind it, according to Sabatini, which says that the Pope and Cesare were taken together with the tertian fever then current in Rome, and that the Pope died of it. No matter the cause: the man was dead. Just before his death, he muttered "I am coming. It is just. But wait a little." His attendants were sure that this was spoken to

the Devil; and out of this grew whispers that servant after servant had seen the Devil, in the shape of a baboon, on that occasion. More wonders were related: that, after death, water boiled out of the Pope's mouth, and steam issued from it as he lay in state in St. Peter's. Modern science smiles skeptically at stories of miracles, and blames an overheated imagination and a superstitious age for such fancied marvels.

The circumstances of the Pope's funeral are scandalous enough. The soldiers and citizens rioted; the sight of the blackened body was hideous enough. Blackened, deformed, prodigiously swollen, exhaling a noisome stench, it was a disgusting spectacle: black froth covered the lips and nostrils; the mouth hung unnaturally open, and the swollen tongue lolled horribly out. No devotee or fanatic was found so reverent as to kiss the feet or hands, as was the custom.

The carpenters were told that the body was ready for them: no cardinal, officer, or priest was there to assist at the burial ceremony. Either the coffin brought was too small, or the body had swollen too gross to fit it. In any case, the carpenters, after making sure of this, removed the papal tiara, and replaced it by a piece of old carpet; they placed the corrupt corpse on top of the coffin, and set themselves to force it in anyway. They pressed in the feet, and pounded the rest of the body in with a hammer. So the dumb remains were shoved into an open tomb, already prepared for it at the left of the high altar.

Cesare, says Sabatini, had his body plunged in a jar of ice-cold water up to his neck, so that all his skin came off. More contemporary historians transform the jar into a mule, who was ripped open while alive, so that in the pulsating entrails the stricken Cesare might sweat the illness out of his system. Even darker accounts make the animal a bull, with the sick Cesare performing there some monstrous, foul and unclean rite of some unspeakable religion—a rite beside which the Black Mass becomes sweet and wholesome. In any case, the man recovered slowly. He found his wealth gone, his strength gone, his power gone. In vain he sought for support; the prison was his answer. By an audacious escape, he set the new pontiff to trembling; he fled to France, who turned him down, and then to Navarre, who employed him against rebels in his own state. Here there was a sudden onset: And Cesare rushed out, mounted his horse, omitting to summon his men after him, and, all alone, in the bright light of day, fully armed, rode down against an army, where he was surrounded and put to death. At least the young Bull died with his armor on.

After this record, the succeeding Popes inevitably pale in glitter, worldliness, and wickedness. Leo the Tenth with his French court mistress; the weak Alessandro Farnese ruling as Paul III, accused of incest with sister and daughter; Julius III, who elevated a sixteen year old minion and keeper of his monkeys to the cardinalate—all of these shrink into small compass, when compared with the great

Borgia. His son Cesare was a mere Italian adventurer of the time, adequate enough to dazzle Europe, with the power of the papacy behind him; but, on the death of his father, all of his strength went into the noisome tomb of the old man. Lucrezia, the daughter, was not one of the historic women great in wickedness: she was rather a product of her time and her environment. Corrupted early, she laid by accepted moral standards, accepted the caresses of her father and brothers, permitted herself to be married here and there as her father's political needs demanded, and, after his death, lived for many peaceful years in Ferrara. Only one tragedy marked her later years—the too excessive admiration of Ercole Strozzi, and her husband's murder of this man due to jealousy.

But if these children of the Borgia were small in caliber, Rodrigo, Alexander VI, was correspondingly large. Politically he was shrewd, and wielded a secular power second to none. Financially, his methods were novel, unscrupulous, and generally successful. Finding that morality in his age was the antithesis of the preached Christian morality, he set himself from the start, in spite of his vows and his sacred offices, to living as his desires warranted. His incestuous commerce with Rose Vanozza, her mother, her sister, her daughter by the Borgia, her sons by him, loomed largest in his life; but his affairs with other women, notably the beautiful Giulia Farnese, and others who bore him children, as well as with countless easy wives, girls, kept women, and prostitutes, made him a strange figure to occupy

the papacy from our standpoint, though not from his own age's. He found no consort as splendidly sinful as Marozia or Messalina; he may not have equalled the amorous record of John XXIII. But he had more of a glitter about him than any one of these co-occupants of the throne of St. Peter: he is the most imposing figure of licentiousness that ever stained the great white throne with his scarlet lusts.

The Roman Catholic defense of this master of iniquity is an interesting thing. At first, all of his lusts and incests were generally admitted, and explained as evidence of how incontrovertibly the Catholic faith must be right, since, no matter how wicked an individual stained the throne, the churchly government continued to administer the affairs of Christ to the benefit of the whole world. It is not clear to see how papal bulls elevating the Pope's bastard to high titles, permitting cardinals to corrupt their children sexually, and similar deeds, establishes the proper functioning of the machinery of the faith. A second school of defenders sprang into being, who implied that God sent such monsters of iniquity, to show that the Church could recover even from the shock of having its leader wholly un-Christian, worldly, and licentious. And last we have the more timid, modern defenders, such as Rafael Sabatini,[1] with a double defense. First, they endeavor to disprove the evils, or many of them, charged against the pontiff: Burchard himself does not mention this vice; and, when Burchard mentions another, a man would be insane to believe it. Along with this

goes a more amusing defense, that we have not called attention to. In essence, Sabatini says, Alexander VI was not so bad, after all: if he had bastards, so did other popes, some of them many more than the Borgia; if he murdered, committed nepotism, was accused of incest, so were other popes guilty or accused of the like. Many are blacker, hence he is white. A delightful method of exoneration.

The man needs no defense: he was as he was. The Roman Catholic faith had evolved, by his time, to something utterly different from its simple Judean beginnings. Its chief was a king, an emperor, a secular lord, with children seizing upon the thrones of the world as an Alexander might. It had become the systematizer and controller of much of the sexual vice of Rome and Italy. At such a time Rodrigo Borgia came, played the game as the game was, with minor improvements in technique, and remains an unforgetable exemplar of what organized religion may give rise to. He has left a name which succeeding ages execrate; his pleasures, taken at the expense of others, earned him only a passing thrill, and at the end of seventy evil years, a body bloated and blackened into a thing of horror. His family was a family of bastards: what they became, he made them in large measure. If the God he served rules where he has gone, may he give what mercy he can to this corrupter of his own, this darkener of a world already dark, this bloated and blackened vicar of an evil Christ that never walked the earth, and, let us hope, that never will.

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